

Testimony of Jennifer Pane, Regional YMCA of Western Connecticut  
Appropriations Committee, February 24, 2014

Thank you to the co-chairs, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to testify on the proposed budget before you.

The Regional YMCA of Western Connecticut has been providing high-quality child care and early education in our community for over 30 years. We serve over 350 children every year from ages 12 months to 12 years old. As such, I am here to support the direction taken in this budget to improve coordination, access, and quality of early childhood programs here in Connecticut.

There are three areas in the budget, in particular, that I would like to call to your attention and urge your support.

First, is the creation of and funding for the Office of Early Childhood. Early childhood has been spread over multiple agencies with much larger missions than early childhood. Given the abundance of research about the importance of early experiences, a dedicated Office of Early Childhood is needed to give early childhood programs the attention they deserve. This Office will be instrumental in coordination and implementation of new and existing early childhood programs.

Second, this budget provides additional preschool spaces in order to reach those children who do not have access to preschool prior to entering kindergarten. I urge you to support this space expansion, and allow funding to be flexible to reach children who need it, no matter where they live.

Finally, this budget includes rate increases for early childhood programs. We strongly urge you to support these rate increases, and continue to increase early childhood program funding to keep up with inflation and to maintain and improve quality in state funded programs. Early childhood programs have been operating on flat or reduced funds for too long. School Readiness funding, for example, has not changed since 2006, yet costs have continued to escalate. This has made it very challenging to continue to provide this service to our community.

Thank you for your consideration.